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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HAVANA 020774

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STATE DEPT FOR WHA/CCA

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SUBJECT: REPRESSION IN CUBA WORSE UNDER RAUL, SAY ACTIVISTS

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Classified By: COM Michael Parmly for Reason 1.4(d).

11. (C) Summary: Many Cuban human rights activists believe that repression has worsened on the island since the July 31 "proclamation" that Raul Castro had assumed temporary control. Between October 2 and 5, we asked ten leading human rights and pro-democracy advocates - a majority of them former political prisoners -- whether the level of repression has increased since the announcement. Seven said yes, one said no and two were ambivalent. Several of the activists reported increased Cuban Government monitoring of dissidents. They described the GOC leadership as disoriented, fearful, dangerous and desperate. End Summary.

12. (SBU/NF) A USINT Havana survey of ten human rights activists between October 2 and 5 found that a majority feel that repression in Cuba has intensified since the Cuban Government announced Fidel Castro's temporary handover of power to his brother, General Raul Castro, on July 31. Details are as follows:

13. (C) Miguel Valdes Tamayo, of the Assembly to Promote Civil Society (APSC) and one of the 75 peaceful activists jailed in 2003 (but subsequently freed on health grounds), said yes, repression has increased. Authorities have stepped up their monitoring of dissidents, Valdes said, and are continuing to deploy militant Rapid Response Brigades. He added that the police presence on the streets has increased, and that occasional beatings of activists are occurring. Valdes was briefly detained by police on October 2 and 4, following visits to a USINT Internet center.

14. (C) Elizardo Sanchez, former political prisoner and head of the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and National Reconciliation, said there is no clear answer to the repression question. "The numbers tell us that in August and September, there was a small decrease in the number of documented political prisoners and detainees, compared with the same months last year." However, he said, State Security vigilance of dissidents has sharply increased. "It may be premature to say this, but Raul (Castro) may be saying, 'Maintain the police controls, but without much noise'."

15. (C) Eliezer Consuegra Rivas, a Holguin native and head of the Eastern Democratic Alliance, said yes, repression has gotten worse, and that control against dissidents in eastern Cuba has tightened. "Now we can't even travel freely from town to town. The situation is particularly bad in Holguin, Granma, Las Tunas and Santiago."

16. (C) Darsi Ferrer, dissident physician, said yes, things

have worsened. "Now there is repression against the whole population, not just against dissidents." As evidence, he cited the call-up of Army reservists, and new deployments of members of the Communist Youth League. "Raul, while trying to give the impression of a tranquillity that doesn't exist, has bought enough time to consolidate his power."

¶17. (C) Jorge Olivera, a freed 75er and dissident author, said no, repression has not increased. "It's the same as it was before Fidel got sick. The acts of repudiation are continuing." He added, however, that verbal aggression against dissidents is increasing. He said Cuba was going through a phase of great uncertainty because Fidel, while diminished, is still alive and dangerously powerful. "If Fidel does come back, he will clearly be nowhere near the man he used to be. I'm not convinced he'll be coming back at all."

¶18. (C) Alejandrina Garcia de la Riva, a Matanzas native, Lady in White, and wife of imprisoned 75er Diosdado Gonzalez Marrero, said the answer is yes, repression has risen. "The government is disoriented and fearful. While (officials) still have power, they want to terrorize the population into submission." Garcia, who was subjected to an act of repudiation on September 24, said Gonzalez is currently held in a punishment cell at Kilo 5.5 prison in Pinar del Rio, apparently for writing a message critical of the undemocratic transfer of power in Havana.

¶19. (C) Elsa Morejon, of the Lawton Human Rights Foundation and wife of 75er Oscar Elias Biscet, said yes, repression has worsened. She said there is more pressure now, and a greater police presence. "There have been more arrests, more citations, more fines, against ordinary people who, for example, sell soft drinks without a permit or rent out a car without government permission." Morejon said Cubans see a power vacuum and are hopeful for change, but have seen no progress. "If anything, people live in more fear now than

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before the announcement." She gave the example of Communist Party members and others going door to door in various Havana neighborhoods during the NAM meetings, finding out who lives where and whether all residents are legally entitled to live there.

¶10. (C) Roberto de Miranda, freed 75er and head of the Cuban Independent Educators College, said yes, repression has increased. He said there is "constant vigilance," and that the police on his block station themselves near the front of his residence. In addition, he said, mobs frequently block dissidents' homes, particularly in Camaguey. De Miranda, slowly recovering from dengue fever, joked that although justice was not always fair in the political world, mosquitoes were another matter, and that the local police chief in his neighborhood had also contracted dengue.

¶11. (C) Martha Beatriz Roque, freed 75er and APSC President, said yes, repression has worsened since the end of July. She commented that activist "Oswaldo Paya said the order to kill us (in the event of Fidel's death) has already been issued, and I believe him." However, she noted, the frequent acts of repudiation outside her house have abated. Roque's organization plans to hold a series of gatherings she calls an independent librarians' "Congress," running from October 10 to February 24. Operators of 152 participating independent libraries will hold meetings in small groups at many of the libraries, she explained. (Note: The Dutch Government has provided considerable support in the form of office supplies, she said. End Note.)

¶12. (C) Felix Bonne Carcassas, freed 75er and APSC official, says the repression question can't be answered with a simple yes or no. "Whether the level of repression has increased depends on who you're talking about, and where in Cuba they live." He said that on the eastern half of the island,

things are now much worse than before, but that repression has not increased out west. "There's not only more repression in the east, there's more impunity." Bonne said some pro-democracy and human rights groups are facing more GOC pressure than others. "The ones that aren't doing anything get left alone. But the government hits APSC pretty hard. Our people down in Santiago can barely leave their homes."

COMMENT

¶13. (C) We share the view that repression has intensified in Cuba following the July 31 "proclamation." Some of this increase is visible, such as the greater number of uniformed police and State Security officers on the streets, and the Reservist call-up. But much of it is subtle, including the apparent tightening of travel restrictions on dissidents and, we suspect, the use of GOC-directed Communist militants to heckle the "Ladies in White." We have also received credible reports that GOC authorities are stepping up confiscations of unauthorized literature held by pro-democracy activists. The regime's actions are indicative of a government that is interested above all in maintaining tight control over any and all political activity on the island.

PARMLY